

Tool for Virginia Entrepreneurs

by William Vehrs

The thick veil of mystery surrounding the process of starting a business is lifting in Virginia.

Led by women entrepreneurs, the rate of business start-ups in the Commonwealth has exploded. Internet-savvy and with busy lives that don't conform to a 9-5 office hour schedule, owners of these new business start-ups were becoming increasingly impatient with voice mail menus, "phone tag," and multiple agency/local requirements.

Enter the Virginia Business One Stop.

From a single link on the Virginia.gov website, potential entrepreneurs now have 24/7 access to a tool that provides customized information on the steps required to start their enterprises. By answering a few questions and entering some basic data, One Stop also completes portions of mandatory application forms in a printable format.

The Business One Stop, an initiative of Governor Tim Kaine, is designed to continue the state's ranking by Forbes.com as the best place to do business. "Virginia businesses play a pivotal role in strengthening our Commonwealth by embracing diversity, integrating technology into their business operations, and preserving the economic well-being and safety of all our citizens," said Governor Kaine. "Their success plays a vital role in keeping Virginia moving forward."

Heather McDonough, a business services manager with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, helped develop the One Stop. "As a small business owner myself, I wanted to make the One Stop as user-friendly as possible and eliminate confusion over what certain terms mean," she explained. "Throughout the process and in the final product, there are helpful tips, definitions, and places to go for more information."

The Virginia Business One Stop was launched in May, 2008, and is averaging 500 users per month. It is featured promi-

nently on the home page of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Business Assistance. In addition, other state agencies important to forming a new business, such as the State Corporation Commission, the Department of Taxation, and the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation also post links to the One Stop.

According to Ms. McDonough, the current version of the Business One Stop is just the beginning. "Right now, the One Stop is only for Virginia-based, for-profit start-ups," she said. "Our eventual goal is to add every business-government transaction to the site." Adding non-profit start-up guidance will be particularly important for the Tidewater area, according to McDonough, as it is the most active area in the state for non-profit formation.

There is currently no charge for the Business One Stop, but that may change in the future as additional services are added. Software development fees can be huge for a complex system spanning so many state agencies and local governments. Recouping that investment might be necessary given the current economic climate, but the current free service is an amazing bargain.

Starting a business was once a dreaded journey into a dark bureaucratic pit. With the Business One Stop, it's only a few keystrokes along a path lit by the soft light of a computer monitor screen. ■

Find the Business One Stop at the Virginia Department of Business Assistance website www.vdba.virginia.gov or through the Virginia Business Portal www.business.virginia.gov. For questions or assistance with starting a business, call the Virginia Business Information Center, 866-248-8814.

The Southeastern Virginia Chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners presents

Meet the Candidates!

Wednesday, Oct. 22 • 5:00-8:00 p.m.
Town Point Club in Norfolk

Our October dinner meeting, "Meet the Candidates" will allow our local, state, and federal candidates the opportunity to share their views with members of NAWBO and various women organizations that will also be in attendance. This forum will be moderated by our very own NAWBO member, Ms. Louisa Strayhorn. All members of participating organizations will be allowed to ask the candidates specific questions about issues that are important to them and their businesses. This not a debate, however. It is a platform for the women business community to be clear on the candidates' positions prior to the November vote!

The event begins at 5:00 p.m. sharp. Prepaid reservations must be received by 4:00 p.m. Monday, 10/20. Register at www.nawboseva.org. Contact Maggie Ruch at 757.846.3006 or registration@nawboseva.org.

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